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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, October 27, 1936

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "MEAT QUESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Sometimes I wish that this new invention called television would hurry up and arrive. Today I'm wishing that especially because I have a letter here from a listener who would like to see an expert make a good pot roast.

"Whenever I try to cook meat this way, it always comes out tough and tasteless," she writes.

You see, if only we had television, I should be pleased to let her see Miss Lucy Alexander of the Bureau of Home Economics prepare a perfect pot roast, step by step. But since I can't manage that, I'll try to give word-pictures to describe Miss Alexander's methods. So now, will everyone interested in making a successful pot roast please put her mind's eye to working while I present "Pot Roast Progress" in one reel, so to speak.

First picture: The cut to use for a perfect pot roast. You have your choice of 4 inexpensive cuts of beef -- chuck and shoulder from the forequarter, or rump or round from the hindquarter. (Housewives in Chicago, so I hear, prefer a cut called the "cross-arm" for pot-roasting, a cut that includes the cap of the shoulder joint.)

Second picture: The pot that cooks the pot-roast best. It is a heavy aluminum or iron pot with a close-fitting lid to hold in the heat and a rack in the bottom to hold the meat, keep it off the hot metal and thus prevent over-cooking or even scorching on the bottom.

Third picture: The roast goes into the pot. Sprinkle the roast with salt and pepper; then dust it with flour; and brown on all sides in beef fat. This browning gives a rich flavor and a brown color to the gravy.

Next picture: A little water goes into the pot along with the roast. Miss Alexander says: "Use about a half cup of water for a 4- or 5-pound roast."

Like all of the less tender cuts of meat, a pot-roast needs long, slow cooking. So in the next picture you see the tightly covered kettle simmering gently over a low gas-flame, or on the back of the stove. The tight cover holds in the steam. As Miss Alexander would say: "Long slow cooking with moisture makes tough meat tender."

The next picture is labeled: "Three hours later." Here you see the roast being tested for tenderness by being pierced with a skewer. You cook a pot roast until tender through and through. And you can test it with a skewer or a long-pronged fork. For a 4- or 5-pound pot roast, allow about 3 hours of cooking.

Wait a minute. I forgot to give you the picture of the vegetables going into the pot, in case you like your roast with vegetables. You put them in during the last hour of cooking. If you put them in too early, they will be overdone by the time the meat is tender, so will lose their attractive color and flavor. To conserve these good qualities, cook the vegetables only long enough to make them tender.

Of course, vegetables aren't required with a pot roast. You can make a good roast with no vegetables. Or you can just use some canned tomatoes instead of water in the kettle. Tomatoes add flavor and the acid helps make the meat tender. Other vegetables often used in a pot roast are: carrots, onions, potatoes, and turnips.

When the pot roast is tender, you remove it from the kettle. You also remove the vegetables cooked with it. To make gravy, mix 2 to 3 tablespoons of the fat with an equal quantity of flour. Combine with the drippings in the pot, and cook until smooth and thickened. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and chopped parsley, if you like it.

Last scene: The tender brown pot roast arriving on the dinner table surrounded with vegetables with the bowl of gravy near at hand.

By the way, any listener interested in making the most of the beef she buys can get a great deal of help from Miss Alexander's leaflet called "Cooking Beef According to the Cut." You have heard of that leaflet, I am sure. And you can own a copy by writing the Department of Agriculture. Just ask for "Cooking Beef According to the Cut." Leaflet No. 17.

Once you get the simple principles of meat cookery, most of your questions will answer themselves. This leaflet starts with the principles of cooking tender and less tender cuts, and then gives directions for broiling steak, roasting a rib cut -- the famous rib roast of beef, and cooking some of the less tender cuts also.

So much for the leaflet. Now to answer another listener who says she can't make a good stew.

The principles of pot-roasting apply as well to stews. The chief differences are that in a stew the meat is cut up rather than in a whole chunk and more liquid is added. Use any less-tender cut for stew. Briefly, the directions for stew are: "Cut up the meat, brown it, add water, and give it long, slow cooking."

Suppose I just run over the rules for making stew with a delicious flavor.

First, cut off the fat from the meat and fry it out until crisp and brown before adding it to the stew. You can brown the meat "as is", or you can roll the meat in flour, and then brown it in fat.

Second. Discard the large pieces of gristle in the meat.

Third. Be careful not to use too much fat, or to drown the meat in water. Use only enough water to cover.

Fourth. If you want a rich brown stew, sear the meat in fat and also brown the flour in a dry skillet. Then brown the onion or other fresh vegetables before adding them to the stew. Remember to add the vegetables toward the last of the cooking after the meat has become tender.

Successful pot roasts and stews take time and care to be good. You have to cook them a long time. And you have to take care about the ingredients you add, especially the seasonings. But they'll return the time and care you give them by being extra good, and making a hit with the family.

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